

VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION

Lesotho



Since 1961.

Program: Healthy Youth

Job Title: Community Services Advisor

Dates of Service: December 14, 2016 – December 13, 2018*

Staging Dates: Sept 26-27, 2016

Pre-Service Training

(in Lesotho): September 28, 2016 - December 14, 2016*

*dates subject to change

AA164 = 3746BR

AA 155= 3752BR



This document is intended to give an overview of the project you are invited to work on in the Peace Corps. For more detailed information about Lesotho and living there, please read the Welcome Book via the link included with your invitation and check out the related Web sites referenced in the Welcome Book.

For more information about serving as a Community Services Advisor in Lesotho, call the Country Desk Officer for Lesotho at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C. (9a.m. to 5p.m., EST):

Toll-free: 1-855-855-1961, press 1, extension 2860

or directly at (202) 692-2323

or via email at Lesotho@peacecorps.gov

A NOTE FROM THE PROGRAM MANAGER

Dear Community Services Advisors:

Congratulations on being invited to serve in the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho! If you accept this invitation, you will have the opportunity to make an important contribution to Lesotho's response to the HIV epidemic and to the country's overall development. HIV is the greatest threat to Lesotho's future and its impact is highly visible. With support from civil society and its development partners, including PEPFAR, the Government of Lesotho, has made progress improving the delivery of critical HIV services to the country's health infrastructure. There is still, however, a lot of work to do at the grassroots level. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will help the youth of Lesotho strive to become an AIDS-free generation and build their capacities in a variety of ways to contribute to Lesotho's growth and development.

Please take the time to carefully reflect on your decision to live and work in the rural areas of Lesotho over the next two years, and what implications this decision may have for you personally. We know that you have lots of questions about living and working in Lesotho. Some questions will be addressed in this Volunteer Assignment Description (VAD) and others during the ten-week pre-service training (PST) program.

You were selected because Peace Corps believes that you have the skills and education necessary to assist in this project, as well as the maturity and resourcefulness to handle the challenges of living in a developing country. You will be expected to demonstrate considerable initiative and flexibility to be effective and make a contribution in Lesotho.

Peace Corps Lesotho (PC/L) staff and your host country supervisor and counterparts look forward to welcoming you and supporting you throughout your service.

"M'e Malitaba Hlabana

Associate Peace Corps Director (APCD)

Healthy Youth Project

PEACE CORPS LESOTHO HISTORY

Peace Corps was invited to work in Lesotho early in 1967. The Peace Corps program in Lesotho has been maintained over the years at a relatively constant number of 80-100 Volunteers, except for a brief time when Peace Corps suspended operations following a political uprising in 1998. Education, agriculture and health have been the principal program sectors for Peace Corps activity. The focus in the placement of Volunteers has been on rural development, which mirrors the country's 85% rural population demography.

The current goals of Peace Corps/Lesotho programming are based on strengthening the capacity of Basotho (the people of Lesotho) to address and effectively respond to various community needs. Currently there are two Peace Corps projects in Lesotho: Healthy Youth, preparing Basotho youth for their adult roles as healthy, productive and active community members; and Education, in which Volunteers teach either math at the secondary level, or English at the primary school level.

Volunteers serving in Lesotho are distributed throughout all ten districts of the country. Healthy Youth Volunteers collaborate with international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), and/or government structures (e.g., health clinics, community councils, local governing bodies, schools).

YOUR PRIMARY DUTIES

Healthy Youth Volunteers are community development Volunteers whose assignments focus on capacity building in the following areas: community health (HIV prevention and education, positive living, and primary health care), and youth development. Some Volunteer sites will focus on one or more of these areas of development, dependent upon the priorities of the host organizations. At other sites Volunteers will work in all areas. You will be matched to a site and host organization based on a variety of factors, including your strengths and interests. Your primary duties will depend upon the focus of your particular host organization.

HIV Response

Lesotho is estimated to have an HIV infection rate among people between the ages of 15-49 of about 23%, and HIV affects all sectors of the society. Because HIV is such an all-encompassing issue in Lesotho, all Volunteers in Lesotho receive training in HIV education and prevention during PST and In-Service Training (IST) and are expected to integrate HIV prevention and care into their work.

Volunteers may work with organizations to implement HIV prevention interventions, with support groups for people living with HIV (PLHIV) to promote positive living, or with children orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV to ensure that they get the services they need.

Volunteers act as resource people in their communities. They do not actually deliver services but may work with those delivering services to improve service providers' skills and strengthen their capacities. Volunteers focus on helping communities mobilize local resources through targeted activities. Volunteers also help service providers develop monitoring and evaluation skills to assess the effectiveness of HIV-related interventions.

The specific duties of the Volunteer vary but may include:

- Promoting HIV prevention and awareness through outreach campaigns;
- Training staff of local organizations or other individuals to facilitate HIV prevention, care and support activities;
- Helping to strengthen linkages among individuals and communities with governmental and non-governmental entities; and
- Providing advice and support to communities to increase access to services for orphans and vulnerable children, decreasing stigma, advocating for services and adopting home-based care strategies.

Youth

Host organizations focused on youth include primarily NGOs, youth centers and informal community-based organizations, sometimes coordinated with the Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation (MoGYSR) and the Ministry of Health. A Volunteer assigned to one of these organizations will work with counterparts to reach out to local youth and help them obtain important life skills, strengthen skills and experience in workplace preparedness, create community service/development projects, enhance positive living through prevention and sexual health education, care, support and treatment for HIV Positive Youth and HIV mitigation for Affected youth, sports and other activities.

The specific duties of the Volunteer vary but may include:

- Training community group members and youth in the areas of life skills, HIV education, sports and the benefits of physical activity, and workplace preparedness to help youth increase their quality of life and livelihood;
- Promotion of household food production through the use of permaculture (small-scale agriculture that conforms appropriately to the local environment) techniques using low-cost, locally available materials; and

- Assisting in nutrition and hygiene education within communities to improve household level nutrition. Where possible, without increasing stigma, the focus will be on households and youth directly affected by HIV.

It is important to note that Healthy Youth assignments will be extremely challenging. Not all host organizations have fully structured jobs and may not know how to use your skills. It will be up to you to work with them to find your niche.

Throughout PST, you will meet regularly with the APCD and Program and Training Specialist (PTS), and a careful assessment of your skills and interests will be made. We will utilize this information and take other factors into consideration when matching you with a site.

Monitoring, Reporting, and Evaluation

One of the exciting parts of your professional work is to participate in the Peace Corps monitoring, reporting, and evaluation (MRE) process. All Volunteers receive training on the Peace Corps MRE tracking and reporting system. Each Volunteer regularly reports MRE information and this information is summarized to describe overall progress of the project. This important MRE system helps Peace Corps improve its programming and report its accomplishments. The opportunity to learn and practice professional monitoring and evaluation skills is one of the many valued benefits of Peace Corps service.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SECONDARY/ COMMUNITY PROJECTS

There will be many opportunities for you to do other community projects in addition to the primary work you do with your host organization. These projects vary widely and are dependent upon community needs and your particular strengths and interests. They can be anything from starting an exercise group or knitting club to helping to start a community or school library or starting a layer (chickens used for eggs) or broiler (chickens used for meat) project. There can be flexibility in the type of secondary project in which you engage and it is primarily dependent upon the community needs assessment and your own creativity in coming up with ways to meet those needs.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Available Resources:

Volunteers who are a part of the Healthy Youth project are each assigned to a host organization with a specific job description. Volunteers work with their host organization supervisor and counterpart to review and clarify the job description. This job description is dynamic and will change over time dependent upon the host organization's needs and the Volunteer's skills. As a Community Services Advisor, you might find yourself working in an unstructured, semi-structured, or fully structured environment. It is possible that much of your work will be unsupervised, or highly supervised. In any case, it is important that the Volunteer develops effective working relationships with community counterparts and supervisors to help ensure project sustainability. PC/L will support you with training during your two years of service.

Strengthening networks among other organizations working in your area and the government is also critically important. Working with your host organization colleagues, you will have opportunities to help communities develop or strengthen links to other organizations and government ministries working in Lesotho. Through these networks, you can help your host organizations identify local resources and build local capacity to support project implementation plans.

Location of Job:

Lesotho is known as the "Mountain Kingdom" and you will find stunningly beautiful, mountainous terrain throughout the country. Most Community Services Advisors are placed in rural villages. They often walk significant distances on dirt roads or mountain trails to reach more remote villages. Some Volunteers are placed in or near camp towns (district capitals) which are more semi-urban areas. Most Volunteers can obtain public transportation near where they work and live, however, some may have to walk a mile or two before accessing a bus or taxi.

Working Hours:

Work hours for Community Services Advisors vary depending on the host organization. Some Volunteers may have an unstructured and flexible schedule while others will follow more regular work hours, which are normally 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday. You are a Volunteer 24/7 and should be available whenever your host organization or other community groups with which you will work need you.

Cultural Attitudes and Customs in the Workplace:

The country and people of Lesotho are generally conservative in nature, due in part to inherited colonial traditions and the influence of well-established Catholic and Protestant missionaries. The Basotho are therefore interested in Volunteers who are self-motivated, maintain professional standards, present a clean and neat appearance and set a good example as dedicated development workers.

During PST, you will receive a full briefing on cultural issues in Lesotho and at your work place. These explanations of Basotho culture include values, norms, religious practices, gender roles, work-place behaviors and general life patterns in a village setting. For now, we ask you to come with an open mind to learn, respect, and adapt to the Basotho culture.

Dress Code:

Volunteers who are professionally dressed and clean are better poised to make a positive impact on those with whom they are working. PC/L has a dress code to which Volunteers are expected to adhere. Unless performing manual labor, business casual attire should be worn during your work activities, when in Maseru or elsewhere on official business and at the Peace Corps office and Peace Corps-sponsored events. This means slacks (not jeans), collared shirts and closed-toed shoes (not sneakers) for men; and dresses, skirts, dress pants (not jeans), blouses with sleeves, and closed-toed shoes (not sneakers) or nice sandals (not flip-flops) for women. Generally speaking, clothing should be durable and comfortable, while also looking professional.

Volunteers should be aware that in Lesotho it is unusual for men to wear hair in ponytails or wear earrings. In some cases, Volunteers have chosen to cut their hair to facilitate integration, and regrown their hair after a period of acceptance in the community.

Volunteers with visible body piercings or tattoos may need strategies to conceal them. In Lesotho, visibly displaying large tattoos could put you at risk. Likewise, having visible body piercings may make it more difficult to integrate into your host community. Keep in mind that Peace Corps/Lesotho staff may ask you to be flexible with regard to piercings and tattoos to facilitate integration in training and during your service. Remaining flexible is the key to Peace Corps service in any country.

Volunteers are expected to be clean and presentable at all times; including during the winter months when bathing can become uncomfortable due to the cold temperatures.

You can find more information in the Peace Corps Lesotho Welcome Book.

TRAINING FOR YOUR JOB

The 10-week PST is a time for you and Peace Corps to re-examine your commitment to being a Volunteer in Lesotho. Training is done to prepare you to become a Peace Corps Volunteer. Attending training is not a guarantee of becoming a successful Volunteer, but rather a process that will enable you to assess your progress towards becoming a successful Volunteer. While we fully expect you to be successful, there are defined goals and competencies that you must achieve before you can be sworn in as a Volunteer. These include language, cross-cultural, technical, personal health, and safety skills that are the keys to your future success as a Volunteer. You are expected to achieve these competencies, including passing a Sesotho language test with an intermediate low score or higher, in order to be sworn in as a Peace Corps Volunteer. You must also demonstrate culturally acceptable behavior when working and living in Lesotho, as well as the ability to make responsible, wise decisions with regard to your personal health, safety and security.

In PST, you will be able to improve your technical skills in order to meet all technical training competencies and objectives. This will ensure that you will be ready to go confidently to your assigned site and to begin work. The Peace Corps training staff and your APCD will give you regular feedback, help you improve your skills to meet training requirements and will closely monitor your progress.

As stated earlier, during PST you will be provided with basic information on HIV and the impact of the pandemic on Lesotho as well as the tools you need to reach people infected with and affected by the disease.

Throughout PST, you will reside with a Basotho host family in order to be immersed into the Basotho culture. You will also have a chance to visit a current Volunteer to learn more about what work and life is like as well an opportunity to visit your future site.

LIVING CONDITIONS

You must be prepared for a number of challenges and for a lack of amenities to which you are accustomed in the United States. This could include things such as inconsistent internet access.

The majority of Volunteers live in a family compound. Your house may be a one- or-two roomed, thatched, or corrugated iron (tin) roofed building made of stone, brick, or cement blocks. You should expect to use an outdoor pit latrine and fetch water from a stand pipe in your home compound or from a village pump, and use candles or lanterns for light.

Volunteer houses with electricity and running water are extremely rare.

Most Volunteers use the main Peace Corps post office box in Maseru (capital city) to receive mail during the first few months. It can take two to six weeks to receive a letter posted in the United States. Once at their sites, Volunteers usually establish other ways to receive mail.

Most entertainment and recreation will be that which you create yourself...hanging out with friends, playing sports, exercising, hiking, etc. Lesotho does not have a bustling nightlife or many organized recreational activities. Most Volunteers shop in their village or closest camp town, which has larger shops that carry basic supplies. Some camp towns have supermarkets that offer a variety of produce, meats, and other goods.

You will soon become familiar with traditional Basotho food that consists of a stiff maize meal (corn meal) porridge called *papa*, well-cooked greens (spinach, Swiss chard, or cabbage) called *moroho*, and a meat dish (mutton, beef, or chicken) called *nama*. Seasonal fruit is available in many parts of the country but can be expensive; vegetable variety can be limited dependent upon the season. Patience, flexibility, and tolerance on your part will be very important.

Lesotho has distinct seasons with hot summers and cold winters. It is below freezing in winter and often snows heavily in the mountains, and therefore it is essential to bring warm clothing (which can be layered) and bedding.

SAFETY & SECURITY

While Lesotho is generally a safe country for Volunteers at their sites, crime exists and vigilance is required at all times. Maseru in particular is considered a high crime city. In 2010, Peace Corps Volunteers were the victims of armed robbery, sexual assault and murder in Maseru. In an attempt to reduce risk, time spent by Volunteers in Maseru is extremely limited.

PC/L will provide extensive training on safety and security, and policies and procedures exist to help you keep yourself safe; however, it is imperative that Volunteers take responsibility for their safety and well-being. Complacency among Volunteers towards crime will not be tolerated, and Volunteers or trainees engaging in behavior that puts their safety and security at risk will not be able to continue their service.

As a foreigner, you will be a novelty to many people and as a result, will face unwanted attention and harassment on a regular basis. Developing coping strategies, a sense of humor and a thick skin will be key to dealing with this.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES & REWARDS

Please reference the [Welcome Book](#) for more detailed information regarding diversity and cross-cultural issues, and safety and security in the Peace Corps.

The Healthy Youth project offers a wonderful opportunity for dedicated individuals to participate in the response to HIV, improve the welfare of impoverished rural households, encourage people to adopt healthier habits, and teach young people and others new skills to improve quality of life.

The success of development projects relies heavily on the ability of communities to mobilize people and other resources. Although the reality of working in such an environment may be painfully slow at times, the reward of helping communities realize their potential is one that many Volunteers assigned to the Healthy Youth project will cherish.

HIV strikes across all social strata in many countries in which Peace Corps Volunteers serve. The loss of teachers has crippled education systems, while illness and disability drains family income and forces governments and donors to redirect limited resources from other priorities. The fear and uncertainty of HIV and AIDS has led to increased domestic violence and stigmatizing of people living with HIV, isolating them from friends and family and cutting them off from economic opportunities. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will confront these issues on a very personal level.

It is important to be aware of the high emotional toll that disease, death, increased number of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) and domestic violence can have on Volunteers. As you strive to integrate into your community, you will develop relationships with local people who might become ill or die during your service. Because of the high HIV prevalence, some Volunteers will be regularly meeting and working with, and living in a community with PLHIV. Volunteers need to prepare themselves to embrace these relationships in a sensitive and positive manner. Likewise, malnutrition, motor vehicle accidents and other unintentional injuries, domestic violence, crime, and corporal punishment are problems a Volunteer may confront. You will need to anticipate these situations and utilize supportive resources available throughout your training and service to maintain your own emotional strength, so that you can continue to be of service to your community.

While Lesotho is generally tolerant, values and mores concerning sexual orientation and gender identity may be different from those in the U.S. Volunteers will need to be mindful of cultural norms, and use their judgement to determine the best way to approach sexual orientation and gender identity in their communities and host countries. Staff and currently serving Volunteers will address this topic during Pre-Service Training, and identify support mechanisms for incoming trainees.



You are encouraged to come to Lesotho with an open mind to work hand in hand with your colleagues, counterparts, and community. Good interpersonal skills, patience, and resiliency are keys to success in your job, as well as to your personal fulfillment throughout your service. We sincerely hope that through your skills, energy, and resourcefulness you will serve as a positive presence in your community to help improve the lives of people in Lesotho.

COMMENTS FROM VOLUNTEERS

“Khotso (Peace) and congratulations on accepting your invitation to join Peace Corps Lesotho! These next few months will be a whirlwind of excitement, anxiety, and maybe some confusion as you prepare to hop across the Atlantic to a small enclave on the other side of the world. Tucked deep within the borders of South Africa, lies the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho. It is the home of a proud and humble culture of people who have lived in these mountains for hundreds of years. However, like many African countries, Lesotho is also home to one of the highest HIV prevalence in the world, ranking third with 23.1% infected. Every Volunteer, no matter site location or job, interfaces with this terrible epidemic. You’ll hear such stories as soon as you arrive about the status of your neighbor or rumors about your local chief’s failing health. Although some Basotho shy away from this topic, others understand the gravity and openly talk about HIV prevention and mitigation. We utilize the skills and flexibility we bring to build capacity within both groups. The mantra of Peace Corps – “The toughest job you’ll ever love” – never rings more true than making a collaborative difference in the hardest of times.

When I was in your position almost a year ago, I romantically envisioned living in a stone-built house without electricity or water somewhere deep in the bush of Lesotho. Today, I live in a cozy two room flat with a majestic view of the Thaba-Tseka mountains in a bustling little camp town of seven thousand people. My house is unusual in that indeed, most Volunteers do live in small, stone huts known as rondavels. Here I teach entrepreneurship and life-skills at a technical institute and am establishing a holistic health club with a local counterpart to provide a space for mental, physical, and sexual health education. Work in Lesotho, however, is much different than our American experience. Every day produces new challenges and surprises you never even considered, but one of the best parts of being a PCV is the support from your fellow Volunteers. You will share your successes and struggles, your anxieties and your empathy. With the help of each other, you will find the inspiration to establish your place and purpose during your two years of service.

As you boldly prepare to leave everything you’ve ever known to enter into an environment that you know so little about, I will try to briefly provide you with some clarity by giving you a glimpse into a Lesotho PCV’s life:

You are sitting in a small bus made for ten but you are in the company of fourteen Basotho, a sheep, and a small shop's month supply of inventory. You know this because two hours ago you counted. Crammed in every cavity there are bags of onions, potatoes, cookies and beans, and other goods that will last some time without the need for refrigeration, but they cut into your leg all the same as you hold your backpack. Out the window, the sun is drifting clearly between the cloud scraping mountains, streaking pinks and orange down in a forgotten little valley where hundreds of round, thatched-roof homes lay claim. The road snakes through the mountains over eight thousand feet in the sky, connecting long settled villages and made for whizzing vehicles that think little of its unprotected drops. You swerve along this carved stretch, satisfying curiosities and sharing conversations with your neighbors, with no hurry to get to any place in particular. This is the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho. You smile as you realize this is your life, so completely different than it was before, and yet, just how it should be.

I wish you all the best of luck!"

-a Healthy Youth PCV '13-'15

“Lesotho is a beautiful country and is home to the most hospitable people I have ever met. The country is rich in its own unique culture and surrounded by breath taking landscapes of mountains and valleys. The people, land and culture continue to amaze me and although living in Lesotho is by no means easy, it is worth it if you take the time to appreciate the small things in life.

Serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Lesotho will test your ability to deal with life. Your entire way of living will completely change overnight and you will have to depend on your own coping mechanisms to get you through difficult experiences. You will have to adapt to a new environment, a new language and a new culture. Life here sometimes can feel like you are on an emotional roller coaster. Staying patient and being flexible are important characteristics to maintain during your Peace Corps service.

Upon arriving in Lesotho, your boundaries will be tried. The pre-service training period will be very demanding and structured and you might find yourself questioning your motives for joining the Peace Corps when you realize you'll be bathing out of a bucket for the next 27 months of your life.

You will experience highs and lows like you have never felt before and see parts of yourself you never knew existed, both positive and negative. There will be moments of intense joy and happiness that will validate your reasons for being here, but be prepared for the moments of uncertainty that will have you questioning the importance and impact of your service.

One of the hardest aspects of my service in Lesotho is having an unstructured work environment. This means that every day I have to create my own activities and jobs within my community. Although this can feel overwhelming at times, it does allow me a lot of freedom. As a Peace Corps Volunteer my role is to help my community members help themselves through capacity building. Currently I have found work volunteering at the local primary and high school where I teach the students life skills. Additionally, I am working on creating weekly groups for the youth and adults in my community where we can discuss topics of interest such as HIV/AIDS, sexual health and nutrition.

I feel that being well integrated into your community is the most definitive way to ensure your service will be enjoyable, productive and safe. Integrating into your community will aid in your understanding of the culture and will allow you to accurately assess your community's needs. Integration will also allow you to expand your resources through networking amongst the organizations and groups within your area. Additionally, through integration you will create friendships with the people in your community which will help you maintain your safety and emotional wellbeing during your service in Lesotho.

Be prepared to be independent, self-motivated and positive. Your site and service are what you make of it. Live in the moment and try to be clear on the reasons why you wanted to volunteer abroad. Your life will never be the same after this experience, and neither will the lives you touch while working and living in Lesotho.”

-a Healthy Youth PCV '13-'15